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RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

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STATE FOR OES/OA, COMMERCE FOR NMFS

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SUBJECT: NORWAY TEMPORARILY SUSPENDS WHALE HUNT

11. (U) SUMMARY: Norway's fishing and whaling industry announced that the 2009 whale hunt would be temporarily suspended due to cash flow concerns and the summer holiday. The hunt will be resumed after a short break. Norwegian whalers and the Ministry of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs also criticized a recent World Wildlife Fund (WWF) report, presented at the 2009 International Whaling Commission, which claims that the industry is not economically viable and dependent on government subsidies. Between 300 - 400 Minke whales have been caught so far this season, out of a quota of 1835. END SUMMARY

Whale Hunt Suspended

12. (U) Norges Raafisklag (The Norwegian Fisherman's Sales Organization) released a statement June 23 that the 2009 whale hunt was suspended due to lack of demand for whale meat. The statement stipulated that hunts to fill existing orders of whale meat approved by Norges Raafisklag would go forward, however no new orders would be accepted. Norges Raafisklag is responsible for arranging and organizing the sales of approximately 80% of whales hunted in Norwegian waters. They also guarantee a minimum price for whale meat. Norges Raafisklag whaling coordinator Per Rolandsen told EconLES July 2 that whaling was halted due to short-term constraints facing domestic producers. Firstly, most of the producers' budgets are tied up with existing fish catches, and the current financial crisis has hampered their ability to come up with enough cash to pay whalers. Secondly, processing plants lack the manpower to process whale meat as July is Norway's vacation month. Rolandsen reported that the shut-down would be temporary, and noted that consumer demand for whale meat remains steady.

WWF calls Norwegian whaling "economically unsustainable"

13. (U) Norges Raafisklag's decision to halt the whale hunt came a day after the release of WWF's "Sink or Swim, The Economics of Whaling." The report contends that the Norwegian whaling industry is not economically viable and has been strongly subsidized by the GON since 1993. WWF marine environment advisor Nina Jensen told PolOff July 1 that the report upset members of the High North Alliance and the Small Whalers Association, two organizations that protect the rights of Norwegian whalers and fishermen. The organizations asserted that they do not receive significant subsidies from the GON, and that demand for whale meat remains high.

Ministry of Fisheries dispute WWF report and comment on IWC

14. (U) Norwegian Ministry of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs Advisor Ole-David Stenseth, told PolOff July 2 that contrary to WWF's report no subsidies were provided to Norwegian whalers. He said funds go only for ship inspections, a research fund, and a DNA register of minke whale captures. He estimated that 300 to 400 whales have been captured so far this year. He repeated the High North Alliance and Small Whaler Association claim that Norwegian demand for whale meat remains high, adding that there is not enough meat available to meet demand. He said the whale industry is economically stable in Norway because of the inherent quality and taste of the meat in addition to the historical links to whale hunting. He also remarked that whale meat purchases have increased and said he expected trade with Japan to create further demand. Stenseth concluded by noting that Norway had no plans to leave the IWC, but that the IWC remains polarized between those who seek to end whaling outright and those who want to hunt with sustainability in mind. He mentioned that if the IWC were to fail, Norway would work through the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission.
JOHNSON